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Former Gadhafi Ally Plots Overthrow

Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi, already on the ropes from a shattered economy and the fear of future American bombing raids, now has a potential knockout punch to worry about: open opposition by the man he most feared would challenge him.

Abdel Moneim Huni, one of the dozen military officers who helped Gadhafi seize power in 1969, recently issued a call to his former army colleagues and others to overthrow the dictator. Huni made his declaration from exile in Cairo, announcing at the same time the formation of a "Libyan Committee for National Salvation." Thousands of leaflets bearing his call to arms were distributed throughout Libya.

Why is Huni's action significant? Because the army's support is crucial to any attempted ouster of Gadhafi, and Huni, unlike exiles leading earlier anti-Gadhafi groups, has strong ties of friendship among army officers in Tripoli.

Once vice president, interior minister and intelligence chief, Huni was Gadhafi's No. 3 man when he split in 1975 in disgust over the regime's corruption and Gadhafi's persecution of dissidents and minorities. Gadhafi was so furious that he tried to have Huni assassinated in Cairo in 1976.

Since then Huni has laid low, resisting all suggestions that he lead the opposition to Gadhafi. But last January he made a secret trip to Washington and conferred with Reagan administration officials.

Insiders described the talks as "inconclusive." But they did establish two important policies: The United States would not oppose any attempt by Huni to unseat Gadhafi, and there would be no CIA funds for him (which would have wrecked his chances for popular support in Libya).

Following the U.S. air raid on Libya in April, intelligence sources tell us, Gadhafi sent an urgent message to Huni in Cairo. He begged him to let bygones be bygones and to rejoin the ruling military council in Tripoli. It was an offer Huni could and did refuse, though he condemned the U.S. raid on his country.

Having observed Gadhafi's erratic behavior since the bombing, Huni obviously felt the time was ripe to announce his opposition. He timed the proclamation for Aug. 30, just before the 17th anniversary of the Sept. 1 revolution.

"The majority of our citizens know that on the dawn of that day, we did not represent anything but the will of the people," Huni declared. "The successive events and the activities of our 'comrade-in-arms,' Col. Moammar al-Gadhafi, soon made clear to us the 'deviation' that he has followed due to his egotism, lust for power, weakness in the face of personal greed and personal hatred . . . .

"The freedom which was the first objective of our military uprising has changed to slavery, bondage, persecution [and] despotic dominion over every citizen who is honorable, honest and moral . . . .

"I send this message to my Free Officers . . . all noncommissioned officers and soldiers. I ask them to . . . move immediately to force Col. Gadhafi to relinquish power and surrender authority."

Huni's open opposition could seal Gadhafi's doom.

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